

Letter to the Editor

Letter in Response to Winkelmann and Schagen, Seidelman and Levi: Call for a New Era in Research on "Medicine/Anatomy in the Third Reich"

To the Editor, *Clinical Anatomy*:

After reading the letters by Seidelman (2009) and Levi (2009) concerning the paper by Winkelmann and Schagen (2009a) regarding Hermann Stieve as well as the response by the authors, (Winkelmann and Schagen, 2009b), I believe a note of caution is in order. Seidelman and Levi recognize the Winkelmann and Schagen study as an important piece of research on the topic but find fault with the representation and interpretation of information concerning Stieve's possible subjection of victims of the National Socialist regime to putative rape. They go on to criticize a perceived lack of respect for the victims by Winkelmann and Schagen. Winkelmann and Schagen respond by defending their reasoning and then criticize Seidelman's interpretation of the data.

I would like to call for a moment of reflection. I believe this discussion has become too acerbic to be productive. It should be recognized by all parties involved that it is time to begin a new era of research regarding medical practices during the Third Reich. We are at a time, where we are uniquely positioned to do this. While Professor Seidelman and his colleagues had to fight an unrepentant postwar German medical establishment for many years until it was ready to investigate its own involvement in the Third Reich (Seidelman, 1999), a new generation of German and international investigators are now ready to study, understand, and take responsibility for this history (Hildebrandt, 2009). Only in the last decade or so have we begun to elucidate the exact details of what happened, to honor and learn from these victims so that future ethical decisions are appropriate. To do this productively, we have to pool our resources and information together as there is much work ahead of us for such an endeavor. We cannot doubt each other's intentions or moral integrity if we are to create a common lasting remembrance of this history.

Lastly, I would like to point out the following: we may accuse Stieve of "abject cruelty" (Seidelman, 2009) if we recognize the mechanisms by which this kind of cruelty came about. We have to realize that the same mechanisms might make some of us also capable of "abject cruelty" given a similar political

and professional environment. If we do not realize this potential in ourselves, we may act like the German postwar physicians who blamed National Socialist medical crimes on "some rare criminals and psychopaths."

Sabine Hildebrandt*

*Division of Anatomical Sciences
Office of Medical Education
University of Michigan Medical School
Ann Arbor, Michigan*

REFERENCES

- Hildebrandt S. 2009. Anatomy in the Third Reich: An outline, part 1: National Socialist politics, anatomical institutions and anatomists. *Clin Anat* 22:883–893.
- Levi J. 2009. Response to "Hermann Stieve's clinical-anatomical research on executed women during the 'Third Reich'" by Winkelmann and Schagen. *Clin Anat* 22:943–944.
- Seidelman WE. 1999. From the Danube to the Spree: Deception, truth and morality in medicine. In: Ganglmair S, editor. *Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes: Jahrbuch*. Ploechl-Druck: Freistadt. p 15–32.
- Seidelman WE. 2009. Response to "Hermann Stieve's clinical-anatomical research on executed women during the 'Third Reich'". *Clin Anat* 22:852–853.
- Winkelmann A, Schagen U. 2009a. Hermann Stieve's clinical-anatomical research on executed women during the "Third Reich". *Clin Anat* 22:163–171.
- Winkelmann A, Schagen U. 2009b. Response to the letter to the editor by William E. Seidelman: Hermann Stieve's clinical-anatomical research on executed women during the "Third Reich". *Clin Anat* 22:945–948.

*Correspondence to: Sabine Hildebrandt, Division of Anatomical Sciences, Office of Medical Education, University of Michigan Medical School, 3767 Medical Science Building II, Catherine Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-0608, USA.
E-mail: shilde@umich.edu

Received 29 October 2009; Accepted 2 November 2009

Published online 11 December 2009 in Wiley InterScience (www.interscience.wiley.com). DOI 10.1002/ca.20914